

Week 5: Healing

Title: **Strong at the Broken Places**

Key Scripture: **The woman in the Temple – Luke 13:10–17** (NKJV used, unless otherwise marked)

Daily Guide corresponding pages: **pp100–104**

Three points: **Strength for the journey. The human struggle. Seeing beneath the waterline.**

PowerPoint pointers are marked in this colour.

Introduction

We are now in the fifth week of the series, Paraclesis: Journeying Together. Today's sermon is called 'Strong at the Broken Places'. This is taken from Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* where he writes, '**The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places.**'¹

Strength for the journey

There are broken places on the journey of life, and if we can journey with others at their broken places, we can bring strength and healing. Broken places can remain a weakness, or become a strength. **Romans 15:1–2** says, '*Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us please his neighbour for that which is good, to be building him up*' (WEB).

Today we come to another paraclesis word: **Parakaleo: 'to comfort'**. '*So comfort [parakaleo] each other and make each other strong*' (1 Thess. 5:11, NLV).

Today, the word 'comfort' generally means 'to console'. We've previous looked at consolation. But the word comes from the Latin:

Com: 'with'

Fort (from fortis): 'fortitude or strength'

So it means coming alongside, 'bringing strength' to build up, restore and repair. Imparting energy and vitality into the soul, enabling people to rebuild and move on with their lives from a position of strength, not weakness.

COMFORT: Coming alongside someone at a broken place and journeying with them to strengthen and build them up, helping them find healing, wholeness and inner fortitude.

So we can provide strength for the journeys of others. **Galatians 6:2** says, *'Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.'* Our very presence is part of the strengthening process. By just 'being there' and journeying with someone, we can help them through a broken circumstance to find healing.

'we must always aim at those things that bring peace and that help strengthen one another' (Rom. 14:19, GNB).

Today our Gospel account is **the woman with the infirm spirit**, which is found in **Luke 13:10–17**. Let's explore her story today. From these verses we can see that **the woman had:**

A pitiful existence [Fill in *Daily Guide*]

'Now, here is a descendant of Abraham. Satan has kept her in this condition for 18 years' (Luke 13:16, GW).

A 'descendant' or 'daughter of Abraham' meant she was a Temple attender. This Sabbath morning, Jesus was speaking and she made her way to the Temple. Hers was a pitiful existence. She was bent double, her hands almost touching the ground. She hobbled into the church. As Jesus began speaking, His eyes fell upon her. He called her forward, and she shuffled her way to the front.

A physical affliction [Fill in *Daily Guide*]

'there was a woman present, so twisted and bent over with arthritis that she couldn't even look up.' (Luke 13:11, *The Message*).

She was a deformed, distorted, disabled bundle of humanity. When she tried to straighten up, a knot of muscle in her back stopped her where the spine had fused and locked her into that position. It probably started eighteen years before with back pain. In order to alleviate and ease the pain, the sufferer slowly leans slightly forward, until eventually bent over. Today this condition is known as ankylosing spondylitis, a kind of arthritic condition that deteriorates over years, also called Marie-Strümpell Disease. According to the Merck Manual, it is a chronic progressive ossification of joints, especially the lower spine. She was trapped in this physical condition.

An infirm spirit [Fill in *Daily Guide*]

'there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years' (Luke 13:11).

Doctor Luke, who wrote this account, observes that she not only had a curvature of the spine but also a disabled spirit, **'a spirit of infirmity'**.

This word 'infirmity' is an interesting word. The Greek for strength is '*sthenos*' and for infirmity, '*asthenos*', which is the opposite. (When you put an 'A' in front of a Greek word it turns a positive to a negative or the opposite. For example, putting an 'A' in front of theist, you have atheist.) '*Asthenos*' means weakness or lacking in strength. She had an external deformity but an internal infirmity. A physical affliction with a spiritual cause. Doctor Luke looks beyond what his eyes see, and so perceives something deeper.

Some suggest this woman was demon-possessed. However, the structure of the Greek narrative doesn't suggest that. Jesus always spoke to demons; here He spoke to the woman. Jesus never laid His hands on the demon-possessed but He laid His hands on this woman. Demons always reacted in the presence of Jesus but there is no reaction or outburst here. (They called out in His presence unless He commanded them to keep quiet.) Furthermore, the Greek word for demon possession is not found in this passage.

Jesus said that this woman was **bound** by Satan. Bound in the Greek is '*Deo*' and it means to bind, tie, or tether. Then Jesus said she was **loosed** from her infirmity. Loosed in the Greek is '*Apolyo*' and it means to loose bonds that tie: to untie, free or release. It was also used as a medical term that meant binding bandages around a wound and here Doctor Luke uses it.

In fact, when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the exact same words are used. Lazarus emerges from the tomb, **'bound [deo] hand and foot'**. Jesus looks at him and turns to His disciples and says, **'Loose [apolyo] him, and let him go.'** (John 11:44). Jesus was telling them to take off the bandages so that he not only has life but liberty.

In the same way, Jesus spoke to the woman, touched her and freed her.

The human struggle

Job 7:1 says **'Human life is a struggle, isn't it? It's a life sentence to hard labor' (The Message)**.

Often, when journeying with people, we find something has wounded and damaged their spirit. Through life, they've wrapped bandages around them – all kinds of bandages. It might be through what they pursue in life or how they relate to others in life that they try to deal with their own wounds. As you listen to their story, recognise that underneath, often

seeping through these bandages, is an open sore, a wounded spirit. As we explore and understand their journey, we begin to find a debilitating broken place.

Understanding infirmities [Fill in *Daily Guide*]

Hebrews 4:15 says we have a High Priest, Jesus, who is *'touched with the feelings of our infirmities [asthenos]'* (KJV). Not touched *by* our infirmities but *'with the feelings'* because infirmities always damage feelings.

'Psychosomatic' is a fascinating word that comes from two Greek words: *'psuche'* (or *'psyche'*) for the soul, and *'soma'* for the body. Psychosomatic impact is to do with how the spirit has direct impact on the body. Our spirits have significant impact in our bodies.

In *None of These Diseases* by Dr I. McMillan and Dr David E. Stern (grandfather and grandson, both Christian medics), they talk about holding things in our spirit like anger, guilt, hatred, fear, stress, resentment and bitterness that actually release chemicals into the blood stream and nervous system. Neurotransmitters convey them from our spirit into our bodies, prompting physiological reactions in the body. There are no inbuilt shock absorbers in the human spirit. God never created us for those things. They're alien to the human spirit, it can't contain them, they're an unnatural imposition, so a wounded spirit throws them off into the body – that's what psychosomatic defines.

Something crippling had happened in this woman's spirit that had impacted her body. Dr Luke links her outer deformity to her inner infirmity, to a spiritual origin rather than an organic or physical cause. Her condition came to define her.

The **J. B. Philips** translation puts it, **'a woman who for eighteen years had been ill from some psychological cause; she was bent double and was quite unable to straighten herself up'** (Luke 13:11).

Superficial assessments [Fill in *Daily Guide*]

Jeremiah 6:13–14 says:

**'from the prophet even to the priest,
Everyone deals falsely.
They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly,
Saying, "Peace, peace!"
When *there is no peace.*'**

This word for peace, *'Shalom'*, means wellness, wholeness and completeness. Here's the indictment by Jeremiah that in the house of God, as this woman was, the message of wholeness was declared but not delivered. They had said *'Peace, peace'* but only healed the hurts *'slightly'*. The Good News translation puts it: *'They act as if my people's wounds were only scratches. "All is well," they say, when all is not well.'*

Seeing beneath the waterline

Human beings are like icebergs, only revealing the tip – what they want us to see. Often other things are going on beneath the waterline. **Isaiah 11:3**, speaking of Jesus, says, *'He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears.'*

In **Matthew 23:27**, Jesus says to the Pharisees: *'you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.'*

Doctor Luke saw this woman's condition, but saw beneath the waterline. Life is never as simple as it seems; human experience always runs deep.

[See/refer to diagram in *Daily Guide*]

In light of this and in order to come alongside and journey with others, we need to:

1. Recognise all behaviour is caused [Fill in *Daily Guide*]

We do what we do because something in us motivates and determines our behaviour. Our lives are always multi-layered. Journeying with people is beginning to recognise that beneath behaviours there is often a wounded spirit.

2. Acknowledge the broken places [Fill in *Daily Guide*]

Stuff happens on the journey. People's spirits get fractured, damaged and broken on the anvil of life. Here are some broken places you may have experienced or seen in others:

- **Broken relationships** – Most, if not all, non-organic issues (that is, non-physical issues) have a strong relational component, broken at the point of a relationship. Family, marriage, peers, friends, church, colleagues. People hurt, that's a fact of life.
- **Broken dreams** – We often live with promises, goals and expectations, thinking life will turn out a particular way. But sometimes promises are broken (by people, never

God), goals are unmet and expectations unrealised. People's hopes and aspirations may be dashed and dreams shattered as a result.

- **Broken heart** – This may be caused by the loss of a loved one, miscarriage, childlessness, unrequited love, a painful break-up, being betrayed in marriage, divorce, abortion. These cause a spirit to be wounded by sorrow, grief and sadness.
- **Broken image** – Identity and self-image may be broken and marred by others through psychological, verbal or emotional impact, for example bullying, humiliation, ridicule, denigration or rejection by others, be they parents, peers, teachers, siblings etc. This causes a badly damaged sense of self-worth and low self-esteem.
- **Broken cisterns** – *'My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewed themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water' (Jer. 2:13)*. A cistern was a large tank cut into rock to hold water and often the rock cracked and the water seeped out. After a while, it would drain away leaving mud and sludge at the bottom. This is a picture of our lives when we try to satisfy our deepest longings with anything other than God. Rather than drinking from a fresh water source, we find ourselves wallowing in mud and sludge. How many cisterns have people drunk from that don't truly satisfy? Possessions, money, pornography, status, idol worship – these may promise to satisfy but they are failing watering holes. And when we drink from them, wallowing in the mud and dregs, we will be broken morally, losing our moral compass; lacking integrity, virtue and purity. These are broken cisterns that will never satisfy.
- **Broken body** – Bodily afflictions, physical and congenital disease and deformity, disability, physical abuse, sexual abuse, long-standing severe illness and incurable disease and injury. Some causes go on unrecognised beneath the water line.

3. Explore the pool of [pain](#) [Fill in *Daily Guide*]

A broken place produces a wounded spirit. A wounded spirit produces a pool of pain.

The common denominator threading through broken places is pain. How we deal with our pool of pain determines our journey. The pain in a wounded spirit is a feeling, *'the feeling of our infirmities'* (Heb. 4:15, KJV). The pain of disappointment, loss, humiliation, shame, rejection, guilt or regret can be debilitating.

People wrap bandages around their lives, trying to ease the pain through all kinds of life patterns. We think we can heal pain but it's the wounded spirit that needs healing. And only then will pain dissolve.

4. Identify a wounded spirit [Fill in *Daily Guide*]

Proverbs 18:14 says *'The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness. But who can bear a broken spirit?'* The answer is no one. We were never created to bear a wounded spirit. God created us with a whole spirit.

Arthur Janov's book *The Primal Scream* brought the aspect of psychological, emotional and spiritual pain to our attention some years ago. He wrote *The Primal Scream*, describing it as primal pain. A wounded spirit, as was likely with the woman in the Temple, will throw itself off in physiological and psychological patterns within our bodies. Our behaviours relate to that pool of pain.

5. Becoming strong at the broken places [Fill in *Daily Guide*]

For a wound not to remain, it needs to become a scar, and for it to become a scar, healing has to take place. Many people live with an open wound and no one has journeyed with them to help them to process the pain of the wound until the wound becomes a scar.

By coming alongside others and working through those hurts below the waterline, we can help them heal and unwind the bandages. But they can only do so by applying God's grace.

- Respond to God's grace

Hebrews 12:15 says, *'Be careful that none of you fails to respond to the grace which God gives, for if he does there can very easily spring up in him a bitter spirit which is not only bad in itself but can also poison the lives of many others'* (Phillips).

Notice it says that if we don't respond to God's grace, a wounded spirit poisons our life and those around us. A bitter spirit is toxic and if we don't deal with it, we become a toxic person.

In **2 Corinthians 12**, Paul describes a 'thorn' in his flesh as an 'infirmity'. A thorn in the flesh means a wound, pain and poison in our system. He wanted to be free from the pain and poison, asking God to deliver him three times, and each time God said, *'My grace is sufficient for you'*. After the third time, instead of responding to the pain of the thorn, he embraces the grace of God and his wound became a grace scar. Having received grace, he declares, *'Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong'* (2 Cor. 10).

When a root of bitterness takes hold we become victims of a broken place. If we live as victims and remain victims, we will victimise others, becoming an agent of pain. It works like this: **'I get hurt so I hurt you to make you feel the same pain as me; make you as miserable as I am. Someone criticises me, so I criticise back. I project my bitterness onto them. I am wounded, so I will wound you and make you pay for my pain.'**

You find this as you journey with people. And this is not to condemn them – God only knows what they've suffered in their lives. We're there to support and love them, bringing comfort, strength and the grace of God. Grace is the antidote to bitter poison in the soul.

- **Choose the pathway of forgiveness**

Forgiveness is a key part of grace. **Colossians 3:13** says ***'bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do'***. We can choose to respond to His grace because He's promised to supply a corresponding source of grace for every circumstance in life. Forgiving as we have been forgiven sets us free from our past, heals us of our wounds and releases us from our pain. We can help people think through God's forgiveness so that, strengthened by this, they can forgive others.

Forgiveness is choosing to let go and choosing to embrace grace. Unforgiveness and bitterness incarcerates, it never rehabilitates. Holding bitterness and resentment in our spirit is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.

Did you know that a pearl comes from pain? When a piece of grit gets into an oyster's shell and wounds it, it releases a soft liquid that covers round the piece of grit, slowly hardening, becoming smooth and shiny – a pearl. That's what the grace and forgiveness of God is like. Forgiveness turns pain into a grace pearl and a wound into a grace scar. In life we either react to the problem, or respond to God's grace. We either become bitter or better. We are left with either a sore or a scar.

- **Be loosed and lifted**

Back in the Temple, Jesus calls this woman forward. He places His hand upon her, His hand of grace, mercy, love and healing, and something breaks inside her spirit. Suddenly, instead of looking at those beautiful feet of Jesus, she lifts her head and looks into the most wonderful eyes she's ever seen before in her life.

Lift your eyes and gaze upon the cross. There are wounds there. Medics tell us that there are five types of wounds: bruising, piercing, tearing, grazing and penetration by a sharp blade. On the cross, Jesus suffered and took all of those types of wounds into His own body. **'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities' (Isa. 53:5)**. The risen Christ is a wounded Healer, with scars to show for it. Scars on His back where He was lacerated. Scars on His brow where a crown of thorns was forced upon His head. A scar in His side where Roman soldiers stabbed His side and pierced His heart – and blood and water flowed out. Scars on His feet and hands. The message of the cross is that God not only saves us and forgives our sin, but that He heals the wounded soul, for **'who can bear a broken spirit?' (Prov. 18:14)**. The gospel responds: only Jesus can. He bore all of life's trauma on our behalf. He paid the ultimate price for our freedom and healing, overcoming sin, death, hell and the devil, once for all.

When we come to Him, recognising our pain comes from our wounds, and are willing to take off our bandages, letting the wounded Healer touch us, then we can come alongside and journey with others, helping them take their bandages off, allowing the healing to flow to them. This is paracletic at work, coming alongside with the comfort and strength of God, making them strong at the broken places.

Jesus saw this pitiful woman, He called her, He spoke words of freedom to her spirit, and He loosed her. He touched her, pouring strength into that pitiful body and healing into those disabling wounds. She stood straight and they had an immediate praise meeting in the Temple. Normal church was suspended, she walked tall and journeyed out of church that morning a transformed woman: not only a woman who was physically healed but whose spirit was released and made whole through the power of Jesus.

I pray you'll have that experience journeying together with others. May we be a church that reaches beyond these four walls and into the brokenness in the streets around us – coming alongside people and leading them to the Healer. His name is Jesus.

We don't have to be bound by the crippling wounds of the past, or live with the pain of the present. We don't have to live at a broken place, we can be liberated and set free in Jesus' name.

¹ Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (London: William Heinemann, 2012) p216

For further reading, see chapter 9 of *Love with Skin On*, Trevor J. Partridge (Farnham: CWR, 2016).

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